

**RETURNED MIGRANT WORKERS' ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF INDRAMAYU, INDONESIA**

Khairu Roojiqien Sobandi*

Abstract

Studies of international migration have highlighted the positive impacts it can have on the development of community of origin. However, it remains unclear exactly *how* international migration leads to positive development. In this article, I argue that the creation of returned migrants' organizations, as a form of political mobilization, contribute to positive development in the community of origin, not only economically but also socio-politically. This article examines the role of returned migrant workers' village organizations in developing their community of origin, using the case study of Indramayu regency, West Java, Indonesia, as it has remained the largest sending area of Indonesian overseas migrant workers for years. The findings of this study highlight the importance of the political dimensions of returned migrants' village organization's work in developing the community of origin, including community development, policy making, and constructing communal village projects.

Keywords: Returned Migrant Workers' Organization, Social Remittances, Migration and Development, Indramayu Regency

* *Department of Political Science, University of Jenderal Soedirman, Central Java, Indonesia and Department of Political Science, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.*

Received: 08/04/2019; Revised: 17/06/2019; Accepted: 30/06/2019

1. INTRODUCTION

International migration from many rural areas of Southeast Asian countries to rich urban Asian and Middle Eastern countries has been widely acknowledged as an effective channel, not only to release the economic burden of those villagers who work overseas as temporary migrant workers, but also as a survival strategy for those who have low levels of education and therefore less opportunities to work in their home country. Within Southeast Asia, Indonesia is one of the biggest sending countries for Southeast Asian temporary foreign migrants, especially following the Asian financial crisis of 1997/1998 that forced many Indonesians with low levels of education to lose their jobs and subsequently leave the country to work overseas (Hugo, 2000). The work they can engage in overseas as low-wage workers, including domestic work, is stereotyped as 3Ds (Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning) jobs by elites in the home country and by local people in destination countries. Simultaneously, these migrants are also praised for the remittances that they regularly send to their family members who remain in the home country, as they directly contribute to the national income.

After the completion of their short-term work, these temporary migrants usually return to the community of origin with increased capital in the form of cash remittances. With such remittances, these migrants play a crucial role in the development of their community of origin, as shown by Levitt (2001), by funding the renovation of schools, health clinics, and community centers. They further work to improve public services and infrastructure

by maintaining their social interactions with current migrants and non-migrants (p.180). In this context, migrants affect the practices of development in the community of origin. The political dimension of this organization not only facilitates the reintegration process of returned migrants, but also transforms the community of origin through local development programs.

The context of Indramayu, West Java Province is included in this topic because this area is known as the top sending community of Indonesian migrant labors. Every year at least fifteen thousand villagers leave to work overseas as temporary domestic workers and factories workers in Asian and Middle Eastern countries. After migration, they typically return to the community of origin. The reintegration process can be challenging due to stigmatization from non-migrants, especially the elites in the community of origin. Such stigmatizations include being thought of as uneducated, immoral, or a national shame. Interestingly, the community of origin is flooded with villagers who returned from overseas with cash remittances. These returned migrants eventually become one of the main groups of actors in the development of the community of origin. However, their economic remittances play only a small role in the impact they make on their communities. Another important role is the socio-political impact of these returned migrants through organization of village organizations to fundraise and contribute to the community's development. These emerging organizations now provide analysts a way to account for and study the ways in which returned migrants have a positive impact on the development of their home

communities, in other words, a way to address the question of “how?”.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To study the creation of returned migrants’ organizations.
- 2) To explore the role of returned migrants’ organizations and the impact of their activities on the community of origin.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: RETURNED MIGRANTS’ VILLAGE ORGANIZATION- BETWEEN MIGRATION- DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSNATIONAL LENS

Given the temporary nature of work in various destination countries, Indonesian migrant workers typically return home to the community of origin, usually located within rural areas of Indonesia. This structure requires them to reintegrate with the community of origin after some period of time, spanning anywhere from two to more than ten years. The reintegration process can be difficult for returned migrants and thus, village organizations were created to provide assistance in coping with reintegration, and more importantly, to channel their desire to transform the community of origin. In this context, a village organization is a voluntary association for returned migrants who come from the same community of origin and are committed to channeling their energy and resources in the development these communities.

These returned migrants are often considered to be development actors and thus, the links between overseas migration and development are examined through the lens of economic remittances (Jones, 1998, Kapur, 2004). The economic remittances sent from overseas migrants to their family members remaining in the community of origin are used for both individual and family needs and thus, their economic status in the community of origin is effectively elevated (De Haas, 2010, pp. 244-245). It is easy to see, then, how returned migrants contribute to the community of origin’s economy by the creation of new demand for goods and services, and the establishment of small businesses (Bachtiar & Prasetyo, 2017, p.15). My field research in Indramayu (January 12, 2018) further confirmed that many returned migrant families have started to build new businesses such as mobile phone services and telecommunication kiosks, small grocery shops, retail petrol stations, or handicraft as new economic source. These businesses are initiated using the remittances that they saved during their employment overseas.

Throughout the literature on migration and development, some scholars view migration as leading to negative development impacts, while others view it as having positive impacts. One such negative impact is the result of what is referred to as “brain drain”, where skillful people leave to work overseas, creating dependency, long-term economic decline, inequality between families, or consumption expenditures in the home countries (Hayes, 1991; De Haas, 1998). International migration has also disrupted the community of origin’s sociocultural cohesion (Hayes, 1991), traditional institutions that regulate

agriculture and village life (De Haas, 1998), and kinship and care structures (King & Vullnetari, 2006). For Hayes (1991), gaining financial remittances through international migration from metropolitan countries like Australia, New Zealand, and the United States has led to negative consequences for the receiving Polynesian countries. They have become very much dependent on these metropolitan countries through international migration and thus, their economies have become oriented toward international migration. In this context, Hayes points out that dependency on financial remittances led to a loss of Polynesian community solidarity, which influenced returned migrants to retain dual identities (*Ibid.*, 9). In line with Hayes, De Haas (1998) argues that traditional agricultural methods the community of origin have also been marginalized due to international migration. An example is provided of the Moroccans who had become highly dependent on economic remittances as their main income, rendering communal agricultural work as unprofitable, further threatening traditional village livelihood.

Similarly, King and Vullnetari (2006) argue that financial remittances through migration have disrupted the traditional kinship systems and care structures of elderly Albanians. More and more young Albanian migrants are leaving their home communities to migrate to richer countries, such as Greece and Italy, in order to find higher paying jobs. Leaving elderly parents and relatives in the community of origin has weakened family bonds. These elderly people feel abandoned in their own communities of origin when their children leave the village, as most do not end up returning and

eventually decrease the amount of remittances sent home. As a result, there is no one to take care of the older people who are left behind in the community of origin. Similar to King and Vullnetari, Kreager (2006) also found that the elderly persons left behind were more vulnerable due to a lack of socio-economic support and public services. Clearly, migration is a crucial factor that contributes to the transformation of the community of origin, with both economic and socio-political impacts.

On the other hand, the optimistic view claims international migration as a catalyst for positive development outcomes. At least in more rural areas, economic remittances from international migration have contributed to a safety net (Jones, 1998, p.4). Even more, De Haas (2007) points out that economic remittances enable returned migrants to access basic education, health care services, and markets, further multiplying the effective utilization of economic remittances. In this context, investment in housing is a clear example of how returned migrants can catalyze indirect economic impacts in the community. As returned migrants begin to access a new standard of education, healthcare, and jobs, they also seek to attain new or larger homes. In communities where such infrastructure is not yet developed, new sources of employment are created in construction (*Ibid.*, pp.16-17). Furthermore, as de Haas (2012) argued, hometown organizations also provide the opportunity to develop the community of origin in a more positive manner.

Such positive development outcomes are also stimulated by the new transnational viewpoint of returned migrants who often engage with other migrants through remittances and discussions about their experiences, among other activities, in the community of origin. The interactions between migrants in destination countries, returned migrants, and non-migrants in the community of origin are often facilitated through information and communications technology (ICT), making the interactions easier, faster, and cheaper (Vertovec, 2004). Such ICTs include mobile phones, internet, and social media outlets. In this context, as Peggy Levitt argues, economic and social remittances flow directly from migrants in destination countries to people in the community of origin. One positive result from these interactions is the creation of returned migrants' organizations. Such organizations are a concrete result of these interactions and are therefore a crucial element in analyzing development in the community of origin. The primary factor that makes returned migrants' organizations possible is social remittances. Through social remittances, as Levitt (2001) pointed out, the migrants eventually have the opportunity to develop themselves, their

family, and the community of origin. Therefore, the creation of these organizations emphasizes the importance of overseas migration, often having a positive impact on development in the community of origin.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article describes the returned overseas migrants' community-based organization in Indramayu, Indonesia (see *Figure 1*) through an ethnographic study. This organization has been involved in community development activities for more than five years since they were formally established in 2012. The fieldwork for this study was carried out in a village of Indramayu Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia for six months from December 2017 to May 2018. Observation of the organization's activities and in-depth interviews were utilized to collect the data. The returned overseas migrant community-based organization's members, returned migrants, non-migrant community residents, and village officials were interviewed in this study. In order to protect these participants, their names, organizations, and home village are being kept anonymous.

Figure 1. Map of Indramayu, West Java Province as the biggest sending area for overseas migrant workers from Indonesia



Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/img/locator/city/071/8771-indramayu-locator-map.jpg>

Indramayu regency's census figures from 2017 showed that the population in Indramayu was around 1.7 million people (BPS-Statistics Indramayu Regency, 2018, p.31) with 317 villages (ibid. p.15). Indramayu is the biggest sending community for temporary overseas migrant workers from Indonesia. As reported by BNP2TKI (2018), Indramayu sends the most migrant workers overseas compared to any other regions in Indonesia with 17,618 migrants in 2017 and 22,144 in 2018. The figures of overseas migrant workers from Indramayu has increased over the years and thus it is no wonder that almost every household has at least one family member who is currently working, or has worked, as overseas migrant worker somewhere in the Middle East or Asia. As reported by the

World Bank (2017), there were more than nine million Indonesian overseas migrant workers in various countries around the world in 2016.

The most obvious result of the flow of overseas migration is economic remittances. As reported by the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) (2018), Indonesian overseas migrant workers sent a total of nearly 11.2 billion USD worth of remittances in 2018, establishing Indonesia as one of the highest recipient countries in the world. Regardless of their enormous economic contribution to the country, many politicians, and even the current president Joko Widodo, seem ashamed by the fact that they work as temporary foreign migrant workers because such

work is considered to be disrupting national dignity (Kompas, 2015). These situations are puzzling to other actors, including the migrants themselves, especially when they return and reintegrate into the community of origin. One response to such contradiction from the returned migrants in the village of the research site was to create a returned migrants' village organization.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Indramayu is recognized as a peasant's community in which most people are small-scale rice farmers or labor farmers who are landless. The transformation from an agricultural to a non-agricultural community occurred as more and more villagers left the village to work overseas as temporary migrant workers. Originally leaving to seek a method of survival, they later returned to the community of origin with new roles and occupations.

After migration, these returned migrants attempt to reintegrate into the community of origin, however, it is often quite challenging. Returned migrants tend to see themselves as "strangers" in their own community, as they now have more financial capital and different social habits acquired during their time spent abroad (field research notes, January 9, 2018). These new resources have elevated their economic status in the community of origin, however, this new status doesn't necessarily give them respect from other villagers due to the stigma of their work.

As low-skill work doesn't require a high educational background, most of

these migrants have only graduated from primary or junior high levels of education (BNP2TKI, 2018, 3). Often, as a consequence of their educational background, many of these migrants were deceived by their middlemen or employers, and even exploited or tortured in the destination country, resulting in their failure to bring remittances to their families back in the community of origin (Silvey, 2006). Moreover, these migrants, especially female migrants, are also stereotyped as immoral due to the fact that these migrants left their family to work as "a beggar" in other countries, considered to be closely related to sex work (Sano, 2012). Thus, their work is considered as disrespectful to the family's name, the community of origin, and national dignity. In this context, returned migrants started to realize that they needed a platform to that could maintain their interest of reintegration into the community of origin, while also providing the opportunity to voice their opinions and channel those voices to the dominant actors in the community. The platform established was a returned migrants' organization, which in Indramayu, was formed by returned migrants who originally came from that village (field research notes, April, 2018).

5.1 The creation of a returned migrants' village organization

The returned migrants' organization was initiated by a few young returned migrants who eagerly and voluntarily helped their fellow villagers who also wanted to work overseas or who experienced difficulties with reintegration in the community of origin (field research notes, January 8, 2018). In addition, many family members of migrants also asked for

advice, information, and assistance from these young returned migrants. For example, many prospective overseas migrants asked them for assistance to obtain the correct documents to work overseas (*Ibid.*). The organization began as an informal group, later formalized in 2012. One initiator was returned migrant G, who worked in Malaysia as a crew member of a fishing vessel between 2000 and 2002. After migration, he returned to his community of origin in Indramayu where he worked as a non-permanent primary teacher from 2003 until 2005 and then in 2006 continued his higher education at a university in Indramayu, graduating in 2015 with a major in English education (interview & field research notes, January 8, 2018). In 2009, while he was a university student, he initiated the organization with two other young villagers. When the organization was formalized in 2012, it was expanded to accommodate all returned migrants and their family members in the home community (interview, January 8, 2018). Their primary objective was to empower their community. Through these organizations, the community could improve its dignity, prosperity, and gender equality. These objectives are a reflection of returned migrants' struggle with reintegrating in the community of origin. Returned migrant G, who was the first chief of this village organization, stated, "... we want to prove to the government [and the elites] that we did not beg, and we were not a 'beggar' [to other countries for work]. We work [overseas] professionally [and] independently" (interview, April 15, 2018). Through their missions, they aimed to: 1) uphold the rights of overseas migrant workers and their family members in the community of origin; 2) create policies that would benefit

the poor in addition to women and overseas migrant workers; 3) facilitate the reinvention of public spaces as places to solve problems through group learning; 4) provide Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) infrastructure in order to transfer knowledge, information, and experiences; 5) develop new economic sources for villagers; and 6) provide critical education about migration to the community (*Ibid.*). This vision served as the blueprint strategy for the village organization to organize and facilitate programs that addressed each of the primary needs.

This hometown organization's initial program in 2009 was to create a *warnet*, which is a low-cost commercial Internet café targeted to middle- and low class consumers. *Warnet* is a shortened form of the phrase 'warung Internet', adapted from the model of the computer rental shop which was popular in Indonesia right after the regime shifted from the authoritarian regime of Soeharto to the transitional regime of Habibie in 1997-1998. Only ten years after the 1998 crisis, in 2009, the hometown organization started to popularize *warnets* as a new space for many villagers, especially family members of migrants, to communicate with their spouses who were working in various destination countries through video calls. At the same time, it also replaced other means of communication, such as written correspondence which was very time consuming, or international telephone calls which were expensive. This project facilitated faster, cheaper, and easier communication between migrants and their family members in the community of origin (Vertovec, 2004).

In 2012, this returned migrants' organization initiated a cooperation with the village government to utilize the free Internet connection in the village office (field research notes, January 10, 2018). Additionally, the village office provides computer facilities in the village library with internet connection. These facilities bring more people to the village office in order to access the internet. Here, the village office became a new space for these villagers to gather to communicate with their migrant peers or families in destination countries. This shared room was a substantial investment from the village government, who granted it with semi-official status. The village government also recognized the facility for accommodating so many villagers, including returned migrants and family members, to share their ideas, knowledge, networks, and how to use the Internet, particularly social media and video calls.

This led further to a joint project between the hometown organization and the village government - a village library. Under village policy No. 6/2013, the village government agreed to allow the *Karang Taruna* (Village Youth Organization) and the hometown organization of returned overseas migrants to co-manage the village library (returned migrant G, interview, January 8, 2018). The organizers of this village library are a combination of village officials, *Karang Taruna*, and hometown organization members. The village organization also provided two computers, and Internet access through Wi-Fi networks in support of library activities (*Ibid.*). Through village library activities, villagers have gained more knowledge and awareness about international migration practices, safe migration, and the rights

and obligations as potential overseas migrant workers.

In summary, this returned migrants' organization was initially formed in 2009 and later formalized in 2012, resulting in increased cooperation with the village government and the *Karang Taruna*. Such cooperation established new spaces for villagers to interact, leading to more awareness and understanding about the migrants who had returned to the community of origin. Additionally, increased engagement led to the positive impacts on community development, as will be explained further in the next section.

5.2 The role of returned migrants' village organization

Given the temporary nature of overseas work for Indonesian migrants, one main role of this village organization is to assist migrants to go abroad and returned migrants to reintegrate to the community of origin. As soon as migrants have returned to the community of origin, they face challenges in adjusting to changes that have occurred in the community of origin. Moreover, they believe these returned migrants only bring negative economic effects because they are trapped into consumerism and cost-benefits calculations and thus, these migrants are very much dependent on their remittances as an external source of regular income. In this context, the hometown organization acts as an intermediary institution to bridge migrants and non-migrants in the community of origin, potentially helping migrants to be accepted by the community of origin again through continued interaction and

understanding. This doesn't necessarily imply that these returned migrants must completely return to their roots and abandon everything that they learned in the destination country in which they worked. Rather, they can supplement local knowledge and even help to further develop their community of origin. This hometown organization serves as a "space" for migrants and non-migrants to interact with each other as a new community.

The next role of this village organization is to advocate for migrants, from pre-departure, to the time they are in the destination country, and even after returning to the home community. In the stage of pre-departure, the hometown organization provides information to prospective migrants, particularly about the destination country and the required documents for being an overseas worker, including passport, working visa, and residency identification card (returned migrant G, interview, January 8, 2018). The village organization also provides information about restricted destination countries and ensures the recruitment companies are legal and have good reputations for taking care of the migrants in their training centers (*Ibid.*).

This organization also assists migrants while they are in destination countries, especially those who have issues with their employers or agencies. It often acts as paralegal, an intermediary institution between the migrants, government, agencies, and other parties. Organization members work voluntarily to resolve overseas migrants' issues such as unpaid salary, exploitation, deception, and cases of human trafficking. As reported by the

chief of the village organization, between 2012 and 2016, more than 90 percent of such cases were coming from countries in the Middle East (Interview, April 15, 2018). However, this voluntary action is very difficult for the village organization, as they do not have an operational budget for handling cases and are often funded by donations from migrants of the same community of origin, or from the family left behind.

Another program aims to engage more villagers in the development of their community of origin. As this village organization cooperated with the village government to provide access to information via the Internet, they also agreed to create an official village website in 2014. This website is run by both parties, who worked to set up the format and content to attract an increased participation of stakeholders in the village. Through the website, returned migrants are able to voice their opinions about their new life in the community of origin after migration. For example, when returned migrants and non-migrants start new businesses in the village, the news of these new economic activities is announced on the website (returned migrant G, interview, January 8, 2018; returned migrant A, interview, April 10, 2018). Sharing news about their achievements has helped returned migrants feel accepted back into the community of origin, further reestablishing their sense of community.

The returned migrants' organization cooperated with the village government in utilizing the ICTs to uphold new values through the creation of official village website. In 2015, this organization managed to persuade the village

government to publish their budget on the official village website (returned migrant G, interview, January 8, 2018). This demonstrated the village government's adaptations to new the new values advocated for, mainly by returned migrants, including accountability and transparency. Both villagers and external parties could access the information about their village government's annual budget through the website. Villagers began to view the village government in a more positive light as they demonstrated their commitment to these new values. As a result, more and more new voices began to speak up in community meetings at the village level. The demand for better public services was not only channeled through the community meetings, but also through this new media, providing a method for villagers who live far away from the government offices to still participate in community development.

The management of returned migrants' organization of this public facility has assisted the community to develop and stay connected with others outside the village, especially those who work overseas. At the same time, the website is utilized to create a sense of community, as the hometown organization has requested the village government to provide information about the master plan of the village (2015-2021), yearly agenda of the village, and important announcements for villagers including calls to participate voluntarily in implementing various programs from the village government (field research notes, April 12, 2018). As a result, many villagers, including migrants who were still in their destination country, became involved in the programs and felt appreciated because their contributions to

the community were acknowledged by the village government on the website through images and stories.

The village's acknowledgement of their contribution elevates the economic and social statuses of these migrants and returned migrants' families in the community of origin. More importantly, these contributions helped to alleviate any suspicions or moral evaluations about the migrants by changing their image to having gained "*rejeki*" (a gift from God). Therefore, the exposure of these migrants and returned migrants' families participation in charity programs on the village website, as a result of cooperation between the returned migrants' organization and village government, has helped migrants and returned migrants' families to gain a more positive image and to reintegrate into the community of origin.

This returned migrants' organization was also deeply involved in policy formulation at the village level in 2012. Three of the young founders of the organization, two being students of law, initiated the idea to draft a policy that would uphold the rights of migrants. They began by discussing internally and then agreed to propose the policy to the village government (an organizer of returned migrants' organization A and B, interview, March 17 & 24, 2018). Later, they campaigned for the policy through villagers' meetings, village council meetings, and directly with the village government to convince them of the importance of the policy (*Ibid.*). These political processes established the organization as a key player in village policy formulation. The policy, No. 3/2012

Protections of Indonesian Migrant Workers, was the product of their hard work to protect their fellow villagers who want to work overseas, focusing on safe migration. This was a breakthrough not only for this organization, but also for this village, to uphold migrants' rights through a village policy. The village organization managed to institutionalize overseas migration as part of the responsibilities of the village government to protect villagers who intend to work overseas and to improve the reintegration processes by providing access to information. In this context, the village office was the center of information for prospective migrants and was therefore obligated to provide complete information about overseas migration, including destination countries, lists of credible recruitment companies, and the required documents for being an overseas migrant worker. Moreover, to disseminate the information, the village government posted it on the village website and social media outlets. This was done alongside traditional channels such as the village announcement board, banners, and more importantly, through community meetings at which all important information for villagers who intended to work overseas and reintegrate to the community of origin were already shared. In short, through village policy No. 3/2012 *Protections of Indonesian Migrant Workers*, the village organization managed to ensure that the villagers will be provided better services from the village government when they plan to work overseas and when they return.

The creation of this village policy to protect migrants and their family members also lead to various empowerment programs such as entrepreneurship, digital

literacy, and financial management trainings. These programs were supported by the village office through Internet access, Wi-Fi connections, and the village library. One of the outcomes of these programs was the creation of a communal cattle farm in 2013, with land provided by the village government and 32 cattle granted from the Ministry of Agriculture (a farmer leader, interview, January 24, 2018). These facilities helped potential farmers to more easily start their business by participating in small-scale communal cattle farming. The village government also provided veterinary services for the communal cattle, checking the cattle both monthly and by request. Some migrants, through their family members, and returned migrants' families started to join this new business and invest their money in the cattle farm as a new form of alternative income in the community of origin. Out of the 17 farmers that this new business secured in 2013, 15 were returned migrants and left behind family members (*Ibid.*). By the end of 2017 there were 32 farmers, including 21 returned migrant families, involved in the communal village cattle farm with 165 cows (*Ibid.*). This demonstrates that cooperation between the village government and returned migrants' organization is necessary, but the financial support is what truly determines the success of the cooperation between the two parties.

This section makes evident that a crucial role of returned migrants' organizations is to serve as a means for returned migrants and others in the community of origin to interact with each other in new ways and to contribute to the positive development of the village. Part of

their role also focuses on assisting in the reintegration of returned migrants.

5.3 The dynamics of returned migrants' village organization

The creation of returned migrants' organization has indeed helped many migrants and returned migrants with the reintegration processes in the community of origin. Moreover, the innovations from this hometown organization gained the village acknowledgement from the central government as one of the most innovative villages in Indonesia in 2016, especially the creation of the village policy No. 3/2012 (a village headman, interview, January 19, 2018). This reward has brought the village much pride.

However, the village organization members are not experts in community development or in the reintegration processes. More importantly, these people have their own work in the community of origin and thus, this hometown organization often lacks crucial resources to initiate programs. Having new ideas, knowledge, and networks as a result of their overseas migration has improved statuses and positions in the community of origin. However, these same people may also have different preferences in prioritizing the programs, as an individual or as part of the group, therefore the programs that they create may not necessarily meet the community of origin's immediate needs. In the case of this research site in Indramayu, this is exactly what happened. The village organization created their own agenda in order to fulfill the needs of their fellow returned migrants such as the creation of *warnet*, the provision of trainings, and the

development of policies. Such changes are causing the villagers to believe that their community is starting to transform from an agricultural to an industrial society.

These new developments resulted in rising tensions between returned migrants and non-migrants in the village. For example, the creation of the *warnet* and provision of free Wi-Fi connection flooded the village with information about modern lifestyles and lucrative jobs in urban areas, including overseas, which caused younger generations to be reluctant about accepting farming as a promising job. This situation created concerns for non-migrant villagers, especially younger generations of farmers who no longer viewed farming as a favorable job due its low income and outdated life style (interview with the village headman, January 27, 2018). This confirms De Haas's (1998, 67) argument that the traditional agricultural lifestyle was marginalized in rural Morocco because many villagers began to prefer working overseas as migrant workers to receive a higher income. Although some of these migrants do return to their roots as farmers in the community of origin, they are more likely to adopt modern practices of agriculture that employ a small numbers of workers and turn over higher profits (*Ibid.*). Such new developments further aggravate traditional villagers as they are simultaneously being overlooked by the village government who gives more attention to returned migrants and their organization.

Politically, the village headman views this hometown organization as an emerging group in his village and has put forth effort to engage with and eventually

dominate this hometown organization. One effective mechanism the village headman employed in 2016 was to recruit the hometown organization leader to be a village official (a village headman, interview, January 10, 2018). He took this opportunity to frame the village policy on the protections on overseas migrants as a policy that aimed to ensure that these migrants were able to safely transfer their money to their family members in the community of origin. This implies that, for him, migrants' rights and safe migration were not the aim of the policy; the policy was aimed to ensure the safe remittance of money to the village. In his view, if these migrants brought more money to the village, the village would develop more rapidly, demonstrating success through new developments. In the same interview, he proudly stated that under his leadership (2009-now) the village has shifted from poor to relatively rich, claiming that the village had been ranked as one of the poorest in Indramayu with more than 40 percent poor at its establishment in 1983 and now, in 2018, only around eight percent of the people in the village are considered poor (*Ibid.*).

However, this close relationship between the village headman; his staff member, who was a former organizer of the returned migrants' organization; and the returned migrants' organization created the impression that the village headman was often taking the side of returned migrants rather than that of the farmers and the rest of the community. The village headman tried to accommodate non-migrants, especially farmers, who believed that the younger generations should preserve their traditional way of life. As this tension was escalating, returned

migrant G, who had become a village official between 2016 and early 2018, decided to resign from his village government position (field research notes, April 12, 2018). He understood that this situation was not beneficial for him nor for the returned migrants' organization, and did not want to be blamed for not forcefully advocating for his organization when he was part the village government. Here, the resignation of returned migrant G as a village official actually served in the interest of both parties, as the village headman was no longer associated with the returned migrants' organization and returned migrant G could turn his efforts toward his organization. Therefore, the tensions that rose between the returned migrants' organization, the village headman, and traditional villagers were part of this returned migrants' organization's dynamics in transforming the village.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This article argues that returned migrants' organization and their involvement in village politics has developed our understanding of how such organizations can contribute positively to development. Due to stigmatization of returned migrants as beggars, sex workers, and social pollutants, this organization initially served as an intermediary institution for returned migrants to reintegrate into the community of origin after migration. This organization, in particular, facilitated reintegration by establishing a *warnet* and the village library as new spaces for interaction between returned migrants and non-migrants. The initial role of the returned migrants' hometown organization has

developed into a paralegal role, advocating for migrants and their family that remains in-country in dealing with overseas labor recruitment companies, bureaucracy, and employers. They also engage in community development, such as developing a village website, promoting their activities, and encouraging the village government to utilize the website as a tool to create a more accountable and transparent government by publishing the village budget and master plan. These new developments create opportunities for villagers to participate in village government. More importantly, this organization is also involved in policymaking at the village level.

The implementation of this policy was a milestone for the returned migrants' organization, catching the attention of the village headman who then became interested to engage and cooperate with them even more. One example of their cooperation was the communal cattle farm. Other such activities are facilitated partially through the flow of capital into the community by way of returned migrants' remittances. As community development activities, then, are tied directly to such remittances, it became even more important to maintain this source of income through the continued support and sending of migrant workers. These factors contribute to the emergence of the returned migrants' organization as a new actor in micro-politics, or local village politics, further contributing to the transformation of the community of origin.

The study of this returned migrants' organization has shed light on the importance of its role in the community, offering crucial lessons for

policy makers in Indonesia, as well as in other Southeast Asian countries, to encourage the formation of similar returned migrants' organizations to further contribute to community development. More importantly, as the literature pointed out, some scholars see this phenomenon as negative while others see it more positively. The village in Indramayu, Indonesia faced tensions, but the returned migrants' organization provided a means of working through those challenges to both integrate and utilize their elevated social status to help the community. The consequences of international migration on community development are not necessarily only negative or positive, but can manifest as both, as in the case of the village in Indramayu, Indonesia studied here. This article discussed how the mix of positive and negative consequences of migration on the village created tension between returned migrants and traditional villagers, further contributing to the literature on international migration and development. The analysis of fieldwork data concluded that rising tension is a direct result of international migration in relation to development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to the Indonesian Fund for Education (LPDP) and the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education for the 2016 Indonesian Lecturer Scholarship (BUDI-LN) for their scholarship to the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. I also would like to express sincere gratitude to the reviewers and Dr. James S. Ockey for providing comments on an earlier draft.

REFERENCES

- Bachtiar, P. P., & Prasetyo, D. D. (2017). *Return Migration and Various Reintegration Programs for Low-Skilled Migrant Workers in Indonesia*. Jakarta: The SMERU Research Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.smeru.or.id/sites/default/files/publication/returnmigration.pdf>
- BNP2TKI. (2018). *Data Penempatan dan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (Placement and Protection Data of Indonesian Overseas Migrant Workers)*. Jakarta: BNP2TKI (Indonesian Overseas Workers National Authority for Placement and Protection).
- BPS-Statistics of Indramayu Regency. (2018). *Kabupaten Indramayu dalam Angka 2018 (Indramayu in Figures 2018)*. Indramayu: BPS-Statistics of Indramayu Regency.
- De Haas, H. (1998). Socio-Economic Transformations and Oasis Agriculture in Southern. In L. De Haan, & P. Blaikie (Eds.), *Looking at Maps in the Dark: Directions for Geographical Research in Land Management and Sustainable Development in Rural and Urban Environments of the Third World* (pp. 65-78). Utrecht/Amsterdam: Royal Dutch Geographical Society/Faculty of Environmental Sciences, University of Amsterdam.
- De Haas, H. (2007). *Remittances and Social Development: A Conceptual Review of the Literature*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).
- De Haas, H. (2010). Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective. *International Migration Review*, 44(1), 227–264.
- De Haas, H. (2012). The Migration and Development Pendulum: A Critical View on Research and Policy. *International Migration*, 50(3), 8-25.
- Hayes, G. (1991). Migration, Metascience, and Development Policy in Island Polynesia. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 3(1), 1-58.
- Hugo, G. (2000). Indonesian International Labour Migrants: Characteristics and Information Needs. In G. Hugo, & W. R. Bohning, *Providing Information to Outgoing Indonesian Migrant Workers* (pp.

- 11-32). Manila: International Labour Office.
- Jones, R. C. (1998). Introduction: The Renewed Role of Remittances in the New World Order. *Economic Geography*, 74(1), 1-7.
- Kapur, D. (2004). *Remittances: The New Development Mantra?* New York and Geneva: United Nations.
- King, R., & Vullnetari, J. (2006). Orphan Pensioners and Migrating Grandparents: the Impact of Mass Migration on Older People in Rural Albania. *Ageing & Society*, 26, 783-816.
- KNOMAD. (2018). *Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook*. The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD). Retrieved from <https://www.knomad.org/publication/migration-and-development-brief-30>
- Kompas. (2015, February 14). *Jokowi Akan Stop Pengiriman TKI (Jokowi Will Stop the Sending of Indonesian Migrant Workers)*. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from Kompas.com: <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2015/02/14/03274001/Jokowi.akan.Stop.Pengiriman.TKI>
- Kreager, P. (2006). Migration, Social Structure and Old-age Support Networks: A Comparison of Three Indonesian Communities. *Ageing Soc.*, 26(1), 37-60.
- Levitt, P. (2001). *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sano, A. (2012). Agency and Resilience in the Sex Trade: Adolescent Girls in Rural Indramayu. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 13(1), 21-35.
- Silvey, R. (2006). Consuming the Transnational Family: Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers to Saudi Arabia. *Global Network*, 6(1), 23-40.
- The World Bank. (2017). *Indonesia's Global Workers: Juggling Opportunities & Risks*. Washington: The World Bank.
- Vertovec, S. (2004). Cheap Calls: the Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism. *Global Networks*, 4(2), 219-224.